

Poverty, by America by Matthew Desmond (Penguin Random House, 2023)

A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR: *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, NPR, *Oprah Daily*, *Time*, *The Star Tribune*, *Vulture*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, Chicago Public Library, *Esquire*, *She Reads*, *Library Journal*

Matthew Desmond is a professor of sociology at Princeton University. After receiving his Ph.D. in 2010 from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, he joined the Harvard Society of Fellows as a Junior Fellow. He is the author of four books, including *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016), which won the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award, and Carnegie Medal, and PEN / John Kenneth Galbraith Award for Nonfiction. The principal investigator of The Eviction Lab, Desmond's research focuses on poverty in America, city life, housing insecurity, public policy, racial inequality, and ethnography. - from the publisher

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. For Christians, what responsibilities exist for helping to eradicate poverty in America? What could individuals and churches do to help alleviate poverty?
2. What was one idea in the book that you found most interesting or startling or disturbing?

The following are from the publisher's website:

1. "We've been trained to see the poor as idle and unmotivated since the earliest days of capitalism," says Desmond. He also writes that "these old tropes and stereotypes are dying." When have you experienced these tropes and stereotypes? Do you think their power is in fact waning?
2. In 1961, James Baldwin remarked how "extremely expensive it is to be poor." What might that mean in 2023?
3. America's poverty is not for lack of resources. We lack something else." What do we, as a country, and as a citizenry, lack in this context?
4. Through his research, Desmond discovered that billions of dollars set aside for assistance to the poor remains unclaimed. Why do you think this is?
5. Race and racism are pressing issues in America's poverty crisis. Desmond writes: "Anti-Black racism hardens Americans' antagonism toward social benefits." Do you see this antagonism in your family, in your social circle, in your community? How might you address it?
6. Desmond found that "every year, the richest American families receive almost 40 percent more in government subsidies than the poorest American families." Did this fact surprise you? Can you think of ways that you or your family benefit from government assistance that you've never thought of as "welfare"? Do you think differently about it now?
7. Desmond urges us all to become poverty abolitionists. How does he suggest we do that? Which of these efforts do you think will make the biggest difference in reducing, if not abolishing, poverty?

If you want to see even more questions, look at <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/675683/poverty-by-america-by-matthew-desmond/9780593239919/readers-guide/>

We will try to cover as much as possible, but the questions on this page are what we'll focus on.